

The Brotherhood and

FORREST D. MOYER

FACTIONALISM

Saved people are a great brotherhood. Those who are disciples of Christ are brethren. As brethren the kind of love that God has is to motivate our relationship and actions one toward another (1 John 4:7-21). This kind of love knows no bounds. It is the kind of love that "suffers long and is kind," that "envieth not . . . is not puffed up." It is the kind of love that demonstrates to the world that we are disciples of Christ (John 13:35). When this kind of love is not present, we fall far short of the spirit of Christ and the will of God for our lives.

That those who were brethren have often been divided is a well-known fact. Sometimes division was inevitable. Certainly so when different attitudes toward the scriptures prevailed. When brethren loved the inventions of men more than the will of God, it was impossible to avoid division. Anytime a human invention affected the whole body (local church) and brought it into error, the practice of each member was involved. The only recourse for the faithful was to separate.

Such was true in the case of church support of the missionary society and the use of instrumental music. It is likewise true today in the support of human institutions out of the church treasury.

However, there have often been divisions that were avoidable had brethren followed the spirit of Christ. There is a wide range of things that are neither commanded nor forbidden (1 Cor. 6:12), and, I am persuaded, should never divide brethren. There are also differences of understanding in regard to passages that affect the individual rather than the practice of the whole church. If each of us shall follow God's law of love, we can avoid division in these things. In fact, Paul discusses this in

ROMANS 14

Here inspiration deals with matters in this very category. Some believed that meat was improper

and ate only vegetables and this in regard to Christ (perhaps believing that Christ did not permit meat). These were weak; they were not yet fully mature. But they were not to be disfellowshipped or abused. They were to be received as brethren and not in order to have strifes and disputations with them. Some believed in observing certain days to the Lord while others did not. Again they were to receive one another as brethren without condemning each other. A person who had belief along this line was told to "have it to thyself before God." (v. 22) He was not to pass it beyond measure nor cut off those who were not in agreement. There could be brotherly love even when this difference existed. The differences did not affect the practice of the local church—they did affect individuals.

For years there have been points of disagreement among brethren on several subjects. We have discussed these candidly and openly without feeling it necessary to withdraw from one another. But it seems that there has arisen a disposition among us that if one does not agree with us fully, he is unsound and cannot be fellowshipped. I do not feel that the soundness of a person is determined by whether or not he has the same opinions as I or is in full agreement on matters affecting the individual. To illustrate: the question of a woman's wearing a hat has been discussed for years. There still remains diversity of thought on this. However, it has not caused a cleavage of brethren and will not unless we begin to press our

convictions to the dividing of the body. The same thing is true regarding the qualifications of elders; it is true concerning a Christians's serving in military uniform. There have been discussions as to whether it is sinful to use tobacco in any form. In these things there may be diversity of conviction without factionalizing the church. There are questions concerning marriage that have been discussed for generations and are still being discussed. A calm study of this question without accusing one another of being immoral, soft, or radical is in order. Let us not have the disposition of wanting to cut off brethren. This spirit of factionalism hinders a careful and candid study of the problems.

I suppose that on these points and numerous others there will always be some differences and some things to be learned. We can study and can learn if all of us will act like brethren who truly love each other.

May I suggest to all that we do all in our power to keep from factionalizing the church. If we feel that a brother has erred on some point, let us teach him rather than villify, abuse, or misrepresent him. Indeed, let us love as brethren.

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"PETER STOOD UP"

HAROLD F. SAVELY

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven"
(Acts 4:12). From sunshine Eden's gloomy exit to the entrance of dark Golgatha, sin laden sons and daughters of men joyfully anticipated the momentous Pentecost of Acts two. Such was a notable day of beginning — beginning of the gospel age, dispensation of the Holy Spirit, salvation,

the church, the kingdom, regeneration (Acts 11:15). Eyes of the world have since focused upon the great apostle, leader and spokesman of that occasion and to what he was authorized to "bind on earth" (Matt. 16:19).

Peter. Consider the man. A few days previously he had cursed and sworn, "I know not the man" (Matt. 26:74). At Pentecost, he had greatly changed. Why? Bitter tears of remorse (Matt. 26:75)? Rush to the empty tomb (Lk. 24:12)?

The Sin of

FORREST D. MOYER —

FACTIONALISM

Throughout the New Testament factionalism is condemned. Various words are used to suggest the extent of the factionalism and the sinfulness thereof. By considering some of these words, we can understand the nature of it.

I. SECT from hairesis. Vine suggests that "it properly denotes a predilection for a particular truth, or for a perversion of one, generally with the expectation of personal advantage; hence a division and the formation of a party or sect in contrast to the uniting power of 'the truth' held in toto; a sect is a division developed and brought to an issue." (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, Vol. III, p. 335)

Thayer gives five headings for the word. Among them he suggests: "3. that which is chosen, a chosen course of thought and action; hence one's chosen opinion, tenet; acc. to the context, an opinion varying from the true exposition of the Christian faith (heresy) . . . 4. a body of men separating themselves from others and following their

own tenets (a sect or party): as the Sadducees, Acts 5:17 . . . 5. dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims: Gal. 5:20; 1 Cor. 11:19." (Thayer, p. 16)

It is obvious that whatever falls into this category is sinful and those who persist therein shall not go to Heaven. Please observe the thoughts that are suggested by this word:

a. When one chooses an opinion or tenet that is either not in the truth or that is an extreme application of some principle and presses that point to the pulling away of a group, he has become guilty of factionalism.

b. The resulting group is a sect of division developed and brought to an issue. It is a dissension that has arisen from diversity of opinions and aims. How many times have congregations been divided because of such as this. Many times gospel preachers are alienated because of this very

spirit. These things ought not so to be. If every Christian would do all in his power to avoid this party spirit, we could help to curb factionalism in the church.

What can we do? First, let us never press an opinion beyond what it is—simply an opinion. Let us not isolate some truth and build our whole teaching around that—this, too, could develop into factionalism. Secondly, let us warn those who begin traveling a course that is conducive to this factionalism. Sometimes one begins to press his opinions without realizing that he is doing so. He must be warned lest he lead others into the sin of division. Let us be faithful in studying our Bibles, so that we might know the truth and then plant our feet firmly on that truth. Let us turn neither to the right nor to the left. We dare not lose our souls through the sin of factionalism.

2. **FACTION** from *erithia*. Vine says that *erithia* “denotes ambition, self-seeking, rivalry, self-will being an underlying idea in the word; hence it denotes party-making.” (Vol. II, p. 68.) Thayer says that “in the N.T. a courting distinction, a desire to put one’s self forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts; partisanship, factiousness: Jas. 3:14, 16, Phil. 2:3 (p. 249).”

Perhaps the idea suggested by Thayer is one of the most prolific sources of factionalism—“a desire to put one’s self forward.” Human ambition—a desire to be recognized as outstanding—has led many to actions that make parties or factions. Some want to be champions and resort to “low arts” and partisanship in order to attain such. Their preaching and writings are designed to achieve the image they have in mind. They do not hesitate to cut down a brother or to create doubts about him in the mind of brethren. It is a course of factionalism.

Meyer suggests that the word *erithia* carries the thought of “desire of intrigue, pursuit of partisan courses.” (Comment of Rom. 2:8). The word is

found in such passages as 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; and James 3:14, 16. There are some church members who definitely fall into this category. They have a “desire for intrigue.” Their interest is always in some new thing. Having found something which they think is new or unique, they then “pursue partisan courses” in their exploitation of the “intriguing” doctrine. Consequently, a faction arises from this course. The church is divided; souls are lost; Satan howls with glee. Clearly it is sinful to be guilty of factionalism.

3. **DIVISION** from *dichostasia*. Vine says that this means, “lit. a standing apart.” (Vol. I, p. 329) The word indicates a division in its completed form and some are thus “standing apart” from others.

Here we see even more the result of the factional thinking suggested in our previous studies. The desire of putting one’s self forward, the making of opinion into law—these foster the standing apart. It is tragic but true that brethren are too often standing apart over trivialities—things that do not affect the worship, organization, or purity of the church. At most these might affect the individual. Why have a “standing apart” over such things? This division is sinful and damning.

When clashes come between brethren, each so often has his following. Friends and others rally to support someone involved and to the opposition of those on the “other side.” Splits and factions follow. Motives are impugned; the honesty of others is called in question; name-calling and abusive language is heard. This is factionalism! It is a work of the flesh just as much so as fornication and adultery. It leads men to damnation.

Brethren, the place to cut off division is before it ever reaches such a stage as a “standing apart.” Let us resolve to teach only God’s word—that and nothing more. But let us also maintain the proper disposition as we do so.

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Things That Foster

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FACTIONALISM

Factionalism is the result of improper attitudes and actions. If our actions were right and our attitudes were right, we could eliminate most factionalism in the church. It is our purpose in this study to observe some attitudes and actions that foster factionalism.

MAKING OPINION LAW

There are some things on which the Bible is silent. A person may have a strong opinion concerning a matter. It may well be a reasonable opinion concerning a matter. But it is only an opinion unless God Himself has revealed the matter as law in the New Testament. If one teaches his opinion as if it were law, then you have the breeding ground of factionalism. Many will accept what a preacher says as law. For this reason preachers should be very careful when they stand in the pulpit to make sure that they teach only what the Bible teaches. Opinions are out of place in the pulpit. Someone will nearly always regard what he says as law. Hence, the opinion is not only taught as law but accepted as law by some. However, others will not so regard it. If it is pressed and pushed, a faction can be formed and the brethren thus divided and alienated. Many divisions have come as a result of this. Let us never bind something as law that God did not bind.

To illustrate this point; we all know that some (it

seems most now-a-days) of the movies are corrupt and are not fit for Christians (whether men and women or boys and girls) to see. Because of this fact some have taken the position that it is sinful to see ANY movie. This being so, they realize that television also falls in the same category so they say that it is sinful to have a television set in the house. This opinion is pressed in some quarters to the point of fellowship. I will agree that some programs on TV are morally impure and should not be seen. Also there is a great waste of time with television—time that could be used in studying the Bible or in teaching others. Yet this is not an indictment against the movies or TV per se. To make a law on this would be just as sinful as watching the corrupt movies. The same reasoning could be applied to books. Some books are not fit to read. But this does not mean that it is sinful to read, period! This same thought could be applied in many fields. So let us not press opinions to the point of fellowship or division.

The Bible shows that the Christian woman is to adorn herself in modest apparel. She is to show the "hidden man of the heart . . . the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." (1 Pet. 3:4) There are some who go to extremes in painting themselves up to be seen of men. This, we believe, is wrong. However, some brethren have taken the

extreme position that it is sinful for a woman to wear ANY make-up at all. They are willing to make a test of fellowship on this. They press their opinion to the point of factionalism. This again illustrates our point.

Brethren, if God reveals a thing as law, then we have no choice but to accept it as such. But if it is opinion, let us leave it there.

Another thing that fosters factionalism is

MAKING LAW OPINION

Many reject the law of God on a given subject by saying, "That is your opinion." Sectarians have often said of baptism, "It is your opinion that baptism is necessary." Or, "It is your opinion that instrumental music should not be used." God has given a law concerning baptism. It is plain enough to be easily understood. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mk. 16:16) God has given a law of praise that we can understand. That law requires singing — the fruit of our lips (Heb. 13:15; Eph. 5:19). We dare not relegate these into the realm of opinion.

Members of the church sometimes become guilty of this. Regarding church support of human organizations (orphan homes, colleges, hospitals), some have said, "This is in the realm of opinion." But is it? Certainly not! God ordained the organization that He wanted — the local church. He has no more authorized the local church to support human organizations than He has authorized instrumental music. One is as scriptural as the other; they stand or fall together. God's law must be followed. Opinion should be left as such.

Perhaps one of the difficulties involved in this is how to determine the difference in law and opinion. It is simple to express the difference, but it is not always easy to make the application. **Law is that which God has revealed for us to keep and do. Opinion is that which man thinks about something not revealed.** The application of this would surely help solve many of our problems.

The function of the church is authorized by law. It cannot function where there is no law. But we can never take a revealed law of God and say, "That is just your opinion." This factionalizes the church.

We now observe another thing that fosters factionalism:

AN ATTITUDE OF BITING AND DEVOURING ONE ANOTHER

There is a proclivity on the part of mankind to listen

to evil reports of other people. Often rumors are started and go abroad in the land that have little or no basis of truth whatever. People hear these rumors and form conclusions from them. Then they will verbally or in print "cut to ribbons" a brother because of the "hearsay." If one is going to try to accuse one of hersy, he ought to know what the brother believes before he begins the task. He should not rely on hearsay as to what one believes. After all, it is easy enough to find out.

Through hearsay and a judgment of one because of the hearsay, factionalism often results. Some believe what they hear without checking and draw the lines of fellowship against others. Hence, factionalism and division are begotten. Too often brethren want to "write up" another brother or church far removed from where they are. The only thing they can go on is hearsay. Often they burst into print without even bothering to inquire at the proper source. A sectional factionalism is developed and brethren in other sections become highly suspicious of those from different sections. This ought not so to be and would not be if we would have the courtesy and common sense to know whereof we speak. If a brother is in error (admitting to a conviction or practice which we believe is erroneous) then teach him. But we can do so without name-calling, villification and impugning motives.

Connected with this is the attitude of some who feel that all are unsound who vary in their understanding of some matters that affect individuals. The tendency then is to treat that one with whom there is disagreement as a "publican and a heathen." This promotes factionalism.

If each of us who are Christians would follow the law of brotherly love, we could eliminate much factionalism. This does not mean that we would not oppose error. But it does mean that we would learn what one believes before we attack him. Then when we oppose his error, we shall do so in such a way as to bring him back to God if such can possibly be done.

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